

**Board of Supervisors of Elections  
Executive Summary of Election Cycle Options**

On March 17, 2014, the Mayor and Council directed the Board of Supervisors of Elections (Board) to provide information on the cost of placing City offices and questions on the State of Maryland (State) ballot and having Montgomery County (County) administer City of Rockville (City) elections.

**A. Elections to Coincide With Presidential Elections With City Offices and Questions on the State Ballot**

**1. Cost**

- a. Minimum \$12,000 just to be placed on ballot; that amount will increase over time.
- b. No indication yet of how the State and County will determine costs to be passed on to the City.

**2. Other Considerations**

- a. Change cannot be made in time for 2016 presidential election.
- b. Voter participation will increase.
- c. In 2013 City referendum, 53% opposed holding City elections in conjunction with presidential elections.
- d. The City gives up most control over its elections.
- e. City voters will use County polling places, which may be outside their districts or even outside City limits; no City break-out data available.
- f. Ballot will be longer.
- g. Preliminary election results will probably take longer to report.
- h. Final results not available until 10 days after polls close.
- i. There is a concern that it will be difficult to maintain non-partisanship in the midst of national, State, and County partisan campaigns.
- j. City candidates will compete for resources (staff, funds, publicity) with County, State, and national campaigns.
- k. State not required to place City offices and questions on its ballot.

**B. City-Run Elections Every 4 years in Odd-Numbered Years**

- 1. Cost: Less than the current cycle of every 2 years.

**2. Other Considerations**

- a. In 2013 City referendum, 54% favored 4-year terms.
- b. The City retains control over all aspects of its elections.
- c. The City controls the selection of polling places.
- d. The Board anticipates that the County will continue to assist the City.
- e. Voter participation will probably not increase; may actually decrease.

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**C. City-Run Elections to Coincide with Presidential Elections**

1. Cost: All costs—including purchase/storage/maintenance of voting machines, recruiting and training judges, counting, and publicity—become City costs.
2. Other Considerations
  - a. In the 2013 City referendum, 54% favored increasing the term for Mayor and Councilmember from 2 years to 4 years, but did not favor moving the City elections to be held every four years to coincide with the presidential election.
  - b. The City retains complete control over all aspects of its elections.
  - c. Voters will use same polling places they have always used.
  - d. Voters may need to go to two polling places resulting in confusion and lower turnout in City elections.
  - e. The City may receive no County assistance.
  - f. The City of Rockville is not sufficiently staffed to manage all aspects of an election.

**D. Other Issues**

1. The Board did not address the option of holding elections every 2 years in even-numbered years.
2. The Board did not address maintaining the current election cycle.
3. The cost of the 2015 City-run election is expected to be lower than the cost of the 2013 election.
4. The Board will review the City Code and, as appropriate, recommend changes for the 2015 election.
5. A decision to place City offices and questions on the State ballot may be difficult to rescind.

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When the Board of Supervisors of Elections (Board) appeared before the Mayor and Council on March 17 of this year, it was directed to provide information on the cost of Montgomery County (County) administering City of Rockville (City) elections.

As the Board addressed the issue of cost, it identified other considerations that the Mayor and Council should be aware of in its deliberations on the City's election cycle. The cost and other considerations are detailed in this report. Members of the Board will attend the May 12 meeting of the Mayor and Council, at which it is scheduled to discuss the referendum questions that appeared on the 2013 City ballot, to respond to any questions the Mayor or Councilmembers may have concerning this report.

**A. Elections to Coincide With Presidential Elections With City Offices  
and Questions on the State Ballot**

**1. Cost**

The 2013 election cost the City \$48,000 excluding the cost of City personnel. In response to the request of the Mayor and Council, the Board asked the County how much their elections cost. The County estimates that the 2014 election cycle will cost \$4,754,890 exclusive of personnel.

The County cannot provide even a preliminary estimate on what it will charge to administer the City's elections, in part because many costs are not yet known. A fiscal note associated with Maryland State Senate Bill (SB) 438 (An Act concerning Municipal Elections -- Inclusion of Offices and Questions on the State Ballot) indicates that there will be a minimum charge of \$12,000 just to place municipal offices and questions on the State ballot. In addition to this minimum charge, SB 438 states:

"A municipality shall reimburse the State Board and the applicable local Board for any additional costs incurred . . . on account of including the offices and questions to be voted on in a municipal election on the ballot."

How those "additional costs" will be determined and the formula for allocating those costs to municipalities has not yet been determined.

Although the City may ask the County to manage the election, the City may choose to retain control over the campaigns, which includes, but is not limited to, issues such as financial reporting, campaign literature, and signage. There may be costs associated with this.

## 2. Other Considerations

There is insufficient time for the City to move its elections to the State ballot in 2016 because of the following timeline and corresponding changes to the City Code. It can be expected the Presidential Election Cycle may begin in 2020.

- To meet the requirements established in the legislation enabling a municipality to request that its offices and questions be placed on the State ballot, the City must demonstrate that it "has established deadlines and procedures for the administration of municipal elections . . . that are consistent with [those for] State and County elections" regarding filing certificates of candidacy, filling a vacancy in office, filing a petition, and certifying ballot questions.
- Other requirements of the new legislation, for example a municipality's request to be included on the State ballot must be made at least "18 months before the deadline date applicable for individuals who are required to file a certificate of candidacy . . ."

Voter participation in City elections will increase. Traditionally, the higher on the ballot a contest appears, the greater the number of votes. Although City offices and questions will appear below national, State, and County contests, the decrease in the number of votes related to that placement will be offset by more voters who participate in statewide elections.

Although 54% of those who voted on the 2013 referendum question approved moving to a 4-year term of office, some 53% were opposed to holding elections every 4 years to coincide with the presidential election.

It is not clear what control over its elections and campaigns the City would give up. At a minimum the City will have no control over the recruiting and training of election judges, location of polling places, costs, registration, sample ballots, ballot layout, early voting, absentee voting, curbside voting, same-day registration, equipment, canvassing and counting, reporting results, and challenges.

Rockville voters will use County polling places that do not correspond to City voting districts. Polling places for some City voters will be outside City limits. This may not be a significant issue for voters, but it may be for anyone who wants break-out statistics (e.g., candidates, campaign managers, the Board). The data may not be available at all; if so, there will be at a cost.

The ballot will be longer; therefore voters will need more time to complete their ballot. If the County does not take this into account when it determines the number of new voting machines to order, lines and waits at polling places will be longer; if the County does take this into account, the cost passed on to municipalities will be greater.

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The County has many more polling places than the City. Therefore, it will probably take longer for the County to tabulate preliminary election results after the polls close.

It will certainly take much longer for the County to post final results because the County takes 10 days to count absentee and provisional ballots. Because the total number of voters in State elections is so high, the absentee count rarely affects results. At the City level, however, a few dozen votes may well change results, meaning that the results reported on election eve may not be the results that stand after the canvass.

Although non-partisan contests have appeared on the State ballot, there are concerns that placing the City election on the State ballot would make it more difficult to maintain non-partisanship, or at least the appearance of non-partisanship, when so much political activity is centered on partisan races.

Limited political resources are available for City elections. When presidents, senators, congressmen, and governors are being elected, dollars, time, people, and media converge on those races. Additional resources will be taken up by referenda that appear on statewide and countywide ballots. Voters' attention will be pulled toward these races. This could dilute the focus on City issues and reduce the voters' sense of civic engagement. This may make it more difficult for City candidates to raise money, find qualified staff, and get the attention of City voters. This may even discourage potential candidates from running, which will reduce the voters' sense of civic engagement.

The State is not required to accept a municipality's request to be placed on the State ballot. Should it be the determination of the Mayor and Council to move City elections to a 4-year cycle to coincide with presidential elections and to place City offices and questions on the State ballot, it should have a commitment from the County that it will approve the City's request.

## **B. City-Run Elections Every 4 Years in Odd-Numbered Years**

### **1. Cost:**

If the City moves to a 4-year election cycle, but still runs its elections in an odd-numbered year, there should be cost-savings because the number of elections is halved.

### **2. Other Considerations**

Although 54% of those who voted on the 2013 referendum question approved moving to a 4-year term of office, some 53% were opposed to holding elections to coincide with the presidential election.

The City will retain control of both the campaign and the election.

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Voters will use the same polling places they have used previously (except in District 7). This will prevent confusion and facilitate the collection of break-out data.

The County will continue to assist the City by, among other things, training judges, providing voting machines, and conducting the count.

Holding City elections every 4 years in an odd-numbered year probably will not increase voter turnout.

### **C. City-Run Elections to Coincide With Presidential Elections**

#### **1. Cost**

The Board investigated the possibility of holding elections every 4 years in an even-numbered year. The following cost and other considerations are valid regardless of whether the elections are held in a presidential or a congressional election year.

The County may not provide support if the City holds its election in an even-numbered year and City offices and questions are not on the State ballot. This means the City will have to pay for all costs including voting machines, training judges, all publicity, and counting the votes.

#### **2. Other Considerations**

Although 54% of those who voted on the 2013 referendum question approved moving to a 4-year term of office, some 53% were opposed to holding elections every 4 years to coincide with the presidential election.

The City will retain control of both the campaign and the election.

Voters will use the same polling places they have used previously. This will prevent confusion and facilitate the collection of break-out data.

Although City residents will vote in City polling places for City offices and questions, they will have to go to County polling places to vote for national, State, and County offices and questions. This may lead to confusion and may even lead to fewer residents voting in the City election because of the additional time it will take to travel to and check in to two separate polling places. Even if the City and County use the same polling place, it will probably be the County's and there will still be a need to check in twice and to use two separate voting machines, a situation that may lead to confusion and reduce voter participation in one or the other of the elections (City/State).

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The County may not provide assistance. The City will have to assume all costs including obtaining voting machines, training judges, all publicity, and counting the votes.

The City does not have sufficient staff to manage the elections without County support. Additional staff will have to be hired, trained, and paid.

#### **D. Other Issues**

##### **1. Holding Election Every 2 Years With City Offices and Questions on the State Ballot**

The Board did not address the option of holding City elections every 2 years in even-numbered years. The Board expects the costs, whatever they may be, to be more than the cost of holding an election every 4 years; the other considerations remain the same.

##### **2. Maintaining the Status Quo**

The Board did not address cost and other considerations of making no change to the election cycle (that is, of holding City elections every 2 years in odd-numbered years). The Board notes, however, that the 2013 City election cost approximately \$48,000 and expects the cost of subsequent elections to increase, if for no other reason, because of inflation.

##### **3. Cost of the 2015 Election**

The cost of the 2015 election will be lower because the City will be the test site for the County's new voting equipment. The Board anticipates that the County will provide the equipment, training, and counting at no or reduced cost. Should the City continue to hold elections in odd-numbered years (whether every 2 years or every 4 years) the Board presumes that the County will again charge the City for the use of its equipment and for training beginning in 2017.

##### **4. City Code Review**

Regardless of the decision of the Mayor and Council, the Board will review Chapter 8 of the City Code and, as appropriate, recommend only those changes that it believes must be made before the 2015 election. The decision of the Mayor and Council on the issue of placing City offices and questions on the State ballot will determine how the Board proceeds. The Board may only need to ensure that various deadlines and procedures in the City Code are consistent with those of the State and County. On the other hand, the Board may need to ensure that the City Code is sufficiently robust to allow the City to continue to manage campaigns and elections.

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**5. A Decision to Place City Offices and Questions on the State Ballot  
May Be Difficult To Rescind**

The County has informed the Board that if the City places its offices and questions on the State ballot for one election, the County may not provide assistance should the City decide not to do so in a subsequent election—even if that subsequent election were to be held in an odd-numbered year. Therefore, the City will, most probably be required to assume complete financial and management control of its elections should it want to take its offices and questions off the State ballot.